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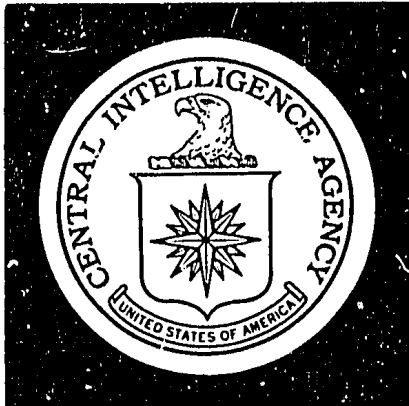
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Intelligence Memorandum

ARMY review(s) completed.

Cambodian - South Vietnamese Frictions

State Dept. review completed

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13 October 1970
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
13 October 1970

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Cambodian - South Vietnamese Frictions

Summary

The extended deployment of some 15,000 South Vietnamese troops in Cambodian border provinces has led to more than the usual frictions attending the introduction of troops into a foreign country. Normal tensions have been exacerbated by the historical antagonism of the Vietnamese and the Khmer and by the maltreatment of the resident Vietnamese minority by the Cambodians last April. The reported application of stricter discipline by Vietnamese commanders and the "settling in" of Vietnamese units in border provinces have reduced the likelihood of further major incidents, but the situation remains serious. The failure of the Vietnamese to establish effective working-level liaison with their Cambodian counterparts, coupled with the frequent rotation of individual ARVN units, ensures that the ARVN presence will remain a significant irritant to the Khmer.

ARVN's depredations will continue to sour relations between the two countries and cause Phnom Penh to think twice before requesting the deployment of more South Vietnamese troops on Cambodian soil. The accumulated effects of the abuses could reach more serious proportions, jeopardizing the viability of military cooperation between the two countries and becoming a major political issue in Phnom Penh. The chances of this happening would increase, of course, if the number of ARVN troops in Cambodia and the scope of their operations increase and if more effective discipline is not imposed.

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence, CIA, with contributions from the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State.

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There is also evidence that the Communists, who emphasize the establishment of good relations with the Khmer population, have effectively exploited the contrast between the behavior of their troops and that of ARVN. Nonetheless, Phnom Penh's grudging reliance on Saigon for various forms of military assistance is likely to continue for the immediate future, at least. In the meantime, however, although military cooperation between the two countries will continue, its over-all effectiveness will fall well short of the potential because of Cambodian resentment and distrust of the South Vietnamese.

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Background

1. Saigon lost little time in capitalizing militarily on Sihanouk's overthrow, and in early April South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) troops made the first of a series of forays across the Cambodian border into Communist base areas. Some of these operations were encouraged and supported by hard-pressed local Cambodian commanders, but Phnom Penh--in line with its early efforts to convince the world that the country would remain neutral--indicated that it did not approve of such collaboration. This attitude changed rapidly during April as the Communists began stepping up their attacks on major towns and lines of communication in areas south and east of the Cambodian capital. The subsequent massive allied cross-border attacks against enemy sanctuaries helped to put an official and long-term stamp on the evolving military relationship between Phnom Penh and Saigon. Presently, Lon Nol and other key government leaders recognize that continuing ARVN support is necessary until the Cambodian Army (FANK) can demonstrate it can bear the brunt of the battle for Cambodia.

The Nature of Saigon's Assistance

2. Saigon's contributions to the Cambodian war effort takes several forms. South Vietnamese air support and the continuing presence of large numbers of ARVN soldiers in Cambodia are the most important. ARVN troops provide security along two main roads leading to the border and conduct periodic sweep operations against suspected Communist concentrations in areas south and east of Phnom Penh. These ground operations have helped ease some of the enemy pressure on the Lon Nol regime. The establishment of a South Vietnamese operating base at Neak Luong, just 35 miles southeast of Phnom Penh, is one of the more graphic illustrations of the semi-permanency of Saigon's military involvement.

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3. Cambodia is also profiting from the training of both new and regular FANK forces in South Vietnam. Early problems of financial support procedures were soon resolved, and reports circulated by irresponsible Cambodian journalists alleging widespread ARVN mistreatment of the FANK trainees were investigated and dismissed. Lon Nol recently has indicated that he wants South Vietnam to continue its training of Cambodian troops, and US military officers who monitor the training have had high praise for the ARVN program. One retrained FANK officer recently seconded this commendation, but, in typical Khmer fashion, also pointed out that the South Vietnamese and Cambodians are co-operating now only because they face a common enemy.

4. The performance of US-trained Khmer Krom battalions in Cambodia has also been beneficial. These troops have, in effect, constituted the government's "fire brigade" and have been rushed from one hot battlefield to another. In addition, Saigon's deliveries of captured Communist weapons and ammunition to Phnom Penh have helped bolster FANK's stocks.

New Allies, or Old Foes

5. There are a number of reasons why most Cambodians would like to limit military dependence on Saigon. The misbehavior of ARVN troops in Cambodia, clearly the main present source of friction between the two countries, has revived and intensified long-standing racial animosity. Reports of misconduct by ARVN personnel have been frequent from the beginning of the cross-border operations on 30 April 1970. At first Phnom Penh was shocked by the hearsay accounts of looting and of sexual assaults on Khmer peasants that were borne to the capital by refugees. There followed more detailed reports of the systematic plunder of Kep and Kompong Speu towns by the liberating ARVN and, in late June, of the well-reported "trail of pillage" left

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by two ARVN regiments called to the relief of the Lovek arms depot north of Phnom Penh. Some of the early ARVN abuses may have been in direct response to the Cambodians' April massacres of a number of Vietnamese civilians and their repressive treatment of others, including those awaiting repatriation to Saigon.

6. A steady stream of reports--and rumors--about acts of looting, raping, killing, and extortion by ARVN continue to be received. Recent reports indicate that large-scale smuggling along ARVN-controlled lines of communication has become particularly galling to Cambodian officials. The Cambodians, including Deputy Prime Minister Sirik Matak and Foreign Minister Koun Wick, are prone to accept all such reports as fact.

Sorting Fact From Fiction

7. It is difficult to determine whether the increased reporting of instances of ARVN misconduct parallels the frequency of known incidents, or whether the level of incidents is rising or falling.

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In any case, regardless of the exact magnitude of ARVN misconduct, the exaggerated versions circulating in Phnom Penh and accepted by the Cambodians constrain existing cooperation and could become a major issue.

The Limits of Cooperation

8. Thus far, the frictions between the Cambodians and the South Vietnamese have inhibited their military cooperation against the Communists

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to only a limited degree. ARVN forces, however, tend, and probably prefer, to operate independently of FANK troops, for whom they have a low regard. This attitude has not been lost on the Cambodians, and FANK officers--including those at the highest level--particularly appear to resent ARVN failure to coordinate operations with Phnom Penh. As Lon Nol's brother remarked on one occasion, ARVN acts more like "conquerors" than allies.

9. Within their operating areas, ARVN personnel seem to lack respect for either Cambodian authority or sensitivities, and there is little coordination on either military or civil matters. On paper, there is a joint committee in Phnom Penh and liaison teams assigned to the various Cambodian provincial chiefs; in practice, the Vietnamese seem uninterested in making such institutions effective.

Communist Propaganda Mileage

10. The misconduct of ARVN troops in the countryside and in some towns has given the Communists a good propaganda opening that they have lost little time in exploiting. Evidence is growing that in some areas the VC/NVA have successfully manipulated local anger at ARVN depredations to win support for their Cambodian protégé, Sihanouk, and his National United Front of Kampuchea. Although outrages against Cambodians by the VC/NVA, as well as friction between Vietnamese and Cambodian Communists, have been reported, the general deportment of the VC/NVA has been better than ARVN's.

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the enemy's comparatively correct behavior in the countryside stands out in stark contrast with that of both ARVN and FANK. The essential difference seems to be that unlike the ARVN, the VC/NVA have made a serious effort to indoctrinate their troops on proper behavior toward the Cambodian population. The Communists themselves do not hesitate to use muscle on villagers when necessary, but they apparently are emphasizing a respectful, kid-glove approach toward the rural population in general. They reportedly are asking

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villagers to observe the way they act, and compare it to the conduct of ARVN and FANK forces. In this respect, the ARVN presence, especially in heavily populated areas, may not simply be a "tax" upon Cambodian - South Vietnamese cooperation, but actually counterproductive.

The Political Millstone

11. In addition to the military aspect of the newly minted relationship between Saigon and Phnom Penh, some serious political considerations are involved on the Cambodian side. One of the most effective devices Lon Nol and company employed to obtain popular support for their overthrow of Sihanouk was their campaign to get the Vietnamese Communists off Cambodian soil. During this campaign they sacked the two Vietnamese Communist embassies in Phnom Penh, harassed the Vietnamese community in the capital, massacred Vietnamese civilians in the countryside, and conducted some military operations near Communist base areas. Within the space of a few short months, however, the Cambodian Government found itself locked in Saigon's military embrace. The anti-Vietnamese sentiments that the government had unleashed had scarcely begun to cool when the first reports of ARVN excesses began to be received, reviving the conviction held by many Cambodians that there is no such thing as a "good" Vietnamese. Lon Nol's private contention that the South Vietnamese are the lesser of two evils has been accepted only reluctantly by many of his supporters.

12. Most Cambodian Government officials and leaders of key groups supporting the regime wish to reduce or eliminate Cambodian dependence on ARVN troops as quickly as possible. Some Cambodians, including FANK officers, have criticized Lon Nol for allowing ARVN troops to operate in Cambodia without some sort of formal authorization containing a withdraw-on-demand proviso. The inherent Cambodian feeling that Saigon has definite territorial designs is undoubtedly a factor in their thinking.

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Actions to Reduce Friction

13. Lon Nol has taken some action to meet these criticisms. Some of the formal written complaints about ARVN abuses received by the Cambodian Government have been transmitted to Saigon via the South Vietnamese diplomatic mission in Phnom Penh. Others, containing serious allegations such as ARVN arms sales to the Communists, have evidently been reluctantly held back by the highest levels of the government. Moreover, Lon Nol almost certainly has taken a much tougher line on the question of Thai troops operating in Cambodia because of his experiences with ARVN forces.

14. Although Saigon has been well aware of the seriousness of this situation, it has been slow to act. The foreign minister has told US officials that his government recognizes that both sides should take all possible actions to reduce this friction, and agreed that prompt investigation of incidents is necessary in order to ensure quick corrective action.

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It is doubtful that ARVN sensitivities will be developed very far, however, or that the Cambodians will be satisfied with isolated disciplinary action.

Possibilities for Additional Friction

15. Senior ARVN commanders reportedly have ambitious plans for large-scale operations in Cambodia during the coming dry season. President Thieu, however, in holding to his conservative military approach on Cambodia, may keep his commanders on a much shorter leash. The level of Communist military activity in South Vietnam obviously will dictate the availability of ARVN forces to help counter an expected increase in enemy operations in Cambodia.

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16. If Saigon can sharply limit the number of its troops in Cambodia, and their areas of operation as well, then the opportunities for incidents should fall off accordingly. In addition, if the Cambodians and South Vietnamese can work out an effective and timely system for investigating incidents, coupled with appropriate punishment, much of the heat should be removed from the problem.

17. The emotional elements of pride and animosity on both sides will, however, work against whatever well-intentioned efforts are made by both Saigon and Phnom Penh to reduce frictions arising from the presence of ARVN troops in Cambodia. Nonetheless, on the basis of the experience of the past six months, it seems unlikely that these animosities will vitally affect South Vietnam's ability or willingness to support the Cambodian war effort. Whatever misgivings it may have, Phnom Penh will have little recourse but to ask for South Vietnamese support if the Communists seriously threaten major positions.

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